

## *Judge parties by actions on climate change*

The Toronto Star

September 14, 2021 Tuesday

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**Section:** OPINION; Pg. A15

**Length:** 735 words

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### **Body**

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As the election heats up, leaders from all parties are promoting their climate plans. Those promises are important. But the best predictor of a party's commitment to climate policy is what they actually did when they were in power.

For two decades, up to 2016, Canadians heard lofty promises but virtual inaction on climate change from successive federal governments. In the past six years, the current Liberal government has done more to tackle climate change than previous governments did in over 20 years - and more than almost any other government in the world in this time.

After signing the original UN climate treaty in 1992, Canadian federal governments did very little to implement it. The Chrétien government set an ambitious climate goal via the Kyoto Protocol, but then didn't put in place any significant climate policies. The short-lived Martin government produced a climate plan and was developing a cap-and-trade scheme when the opposition parties triggered an election in 2006.

The ensuing Harper government set another lofty national climate target (via the Copenhagen Accord) and released a climate plan that promised a cap-and-trade system, but in nine years did very little on climate change. It passed several modest regulations - such as reducing emissions from coal power plants and vehicles - but also deeply cut climate funding and withdrew Canada from the Kyoto Protocol.

The Trudeau government took office in November 2015. One month later, it set a tougher national climate target through the Paris Agreement. Trudeau then brought together the provincial and territorial leaders to commit to meet this target and build Canada's first-ever detailed national climate plan.

Since then, Ottawa has rolled out a series of significant climate laws, including: phasing out coal-fired power (the largest global source of emissions) by 2030; a Canada-wide price on carbon, with revenues rebated to provinces and households; (regulating methane emissions from oil and gas a clean fuel standard, requiring decarbonization of liquid fuels by 2030; and requiring Canada to reach net zero emissions by 2050, with reduction targets every five years.

It has also made major investments to build a clean economy, including tens of billions to build low carbon infrastructure, conserve carbon in farms and forests, grow clean technology companies, and help existing industries (like steel, auto, and oil and gas) decarbonize.

These new policies will significantly reduce emissions, although that doesn't yet show up in the reported data, as critics point out, for several reasons.

First, there is a two-year lag in emissions reporting - the latest data are from 2019, before some of these policies kicked in. Second, the federal carbon price only took effect in 2019, starting at a low level and rising each year. Third, policies take time to achieve their full impact. Firms don't retool their plants, and people don't insulate their

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homes the day a carbon price comes in; but they will do more and more each year, particularly as the price ramps up.

Analysis by both Environment Canada and independent experts (the same firm the Conservatives use) confirms that Canada's climate policies are sufficient to meeting its Paris target. They also have helped build a cleaner economy; Canada now has 11 of the top 100 global cleantech companies.

Of course, a big part of Canada's climate progress has been due to strong leadership from several provinces, led by premiers from NDP (Alberta, B.C.), Liberal (Ontario), and centre-right (B.C., Quebec) political parties. So no party has a monopoly on climate action.

Trudeau's federal government has done a lot, although its climate record isn't spotless - critics point to the Transmountain pipeline, for example. But it deserves credit for being the first federal government in Canada to meet (in fact exceed) its climate policy commitments, even with staunch opposition from conservative premiers, who went to the Supreme Court to try to stop carbon pricing.

The parties' climate platforms matter. But actions speak louder than words as a barometer of climate commitment. And Canada has seen significant action and policy progress in the past six years on climate change, after two decades of inaction and broken promises by previous federal governments.

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## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newspaper

**Journal Code:** TTA

**Subject:** CLIMATE ACTION (92%); CLIMATE CHANGE REGULATION & POLICY (92%); AIR QUALITY REGULATION (90%); CLIMATE CHANGE (90%); EMISSIONS CREDITS (90%); ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION & POLICY (90%); ENVIRONMENTAL TREATIES & AGREEMENTS (90%); GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (90%); TREATIES & AGREEMENTS (90%); EMISSIONS (89%); CARBON NEUTRAL ENERGY (87%); POLLUTION MONITORING, PREVENTION & REMEDIATION (87%); AGREEMENTS (78%); GREENHOUSE GASES (78%); REPORTS, REVIEWS & SECTIONS (74%); ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNOLOGY (73%); LIBERALISM (73%); POLITICS (73%); INDUSTRY & ENVIRONMENT (70%); ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY (66%); EDITORIALS & OPINIONS (59%)

**Industry:** EMISSIONS CREDITS (90%); EMISSIONS (89%); CARBON NEUTRAL ENERGY (87%); OIL & GAS INDUSTRY (85%); ENERGY & UTILITIES (78%); COAL FIRED PLANTS (77%); ELECTRIC POWER PLANTS (77%); NATURAL GAS (77%); METHANE (74%); FOSSIL FUEL POWER PLANTS (70%); ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY (66%)

**Geographic:** OTTAWA, ON, CANADA (58%); CANADA (95%)

**Load-Date:** September 14, 2021

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